

*The Duty and Advantage of setting GOD
always before us.*

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A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN,

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Saint JAMES's Chappel,
on Sunday the Second of March, 1706.

Psalm XVI. 8.

I have set the Lord always before me.

Talbott

By the Right Reverend Father in God, WILLIAM
Lord Bishop of OXFORD.

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OF

COMMON

THE

QUEEN

Chapel

Second of March 1782



in God, WILLIAM

of O. A. O. R.

1782

in the year 1782

Psalm XVI. 8.

I have set the Lord always before me.

THat this *Psalm* was *David's*, we have the Testimony of *St. Peter*, *Acts* 2. 25. where he brings him in speaking these Words of my Text, and the following ones to the end of the *Psalm*, concerning *Christ*: But thought *David* being a Prophet, and a Type of *Christ*, had in them a special Respect to the Antitype, in whose glorious Resurrection they were to be afterwards more eminently fulfill'd, yet, no doubt in their first and immediate Sense, they belong'd to himself, and so I shall now consider them: And in them we may observe

David's wise Practice, and
The blessed Consequences of it.

His Practice he gives us an account of in the Text, *I have*, says he, *set the Lord always before me.*

The Blessed Consequences he relates in the following Verses, viz. An holy Assurance, that God, if he saw it best for him, would deliver him from his Persecutors; or if, for wise Reasons, he should give his Life into their Hands, he would yet redeem his Body from the Grave, *Make known to him the way of Life, and make him full of Joy with his Countenance.*

That which I would infer from both, is this Proposition, That the right Practice of this Duty, of *setting God always before us*, is the likeliest course to promote our Temporal Security, and our everlasting Salvation: This was the ground of *David's* Confidence in relation to both; and the same Confidence and holy Assurance may they raise to themselves, who lay the same wise Foundation for it.

Permit me then to explain to you the wise Course the Royal Psalmist took, and to recommend his Practice to your Imitation, from the blessed Consequence it will produce.

I. For explication of the Duty: And here I shew you Three Things,

1. What is meant by *Setting God before us*.
 2. Under what Notion of him we are to *set God before us*. And
 3. How we must set him *always* before us.
1. What is meant by *setting God before us*: It wou'd be too great an Affront to your Judgments, and Abuse of your Time, to proceed negatively, in satisfiying this Enquiry, and to shew that by *setting God before us* is not to be understood, that we do, or can be any act of our Minds, to make God to be present any where, where he was not, or privy to any Thing which he knew not before; who, whether we think of him or not, is present in all Places, and knows all Things. To proceed there-

fore affirmatively, in the Duty are imply'd these two Things;

1. A firm Assent to, or hearty Belief of these two great Attributes of God, his Omnipresence, and Omniscience.

A practical Consideration of these Attributes, or application of that Belief, to the government of our Lives.

1. A firm assent to, or hearty Belief of these two great Attributes of God, his Omnipresence, and Omniscience. In stating these Doctrines, which are to be the Objects of this Belief, I fear I should no more edify you, than satisfy my self, if I should take my measures from the nice Speculations of the Schools, or the results of those Enquiries, wherein some thinking Men have, with too much freedom, indulg'd their Curiosities: It is a melancholick Thing to reflect upon the variety of Opinions, which these audacious Searches have produc'd, in relation to God's Omnipresence; which differ widely from one another about the manner of it, and yet seem to agree in losing the thing it self.

Some say, That he is not present every where by his Essence, but in Heaven only by his Essence, and every where else by his Power and Providence: And if so, then his Power must be something diverse from his Essence, and may be conceived to be, where his Essence is not.

Others say, That he is every where by his Essence, and of these, some hold that he is so by way of infinite Extension; but how that which has no Quantity nor Parts can be extended, is pretty difficult to apprehend.

Others say, That he is every where after the manner of a Point, and that he is whole every where, and whole like a Point in every part of the World: And if this be so, that the whole Divine Essence is in any Physical Point; then either the whole Divine Essence does not exist without that Point, and then how is it every where? Or if it does exist without that Point, then the whole Divine Essence does exist without the whole Divine Essence.

Others, lastly, not knowing how to reconcile these Contradictions, or solve these Difficulties, have roundly deny'd that God is every where properly, and asserted that his Omnipresence is no real Attribute of God, but only an extrinsecal Denomination, by which he is said to be present every where, only upon the account of his working every where.

But can any thing work every where, and not be every where? can any thing work where it is not?

Then for God's Omniscience, to omit other Particulars, what work has been made about his fore-knowledge of future Contingents, (*i. e.*) of such Things as depend upon free Agents, that have a liberty of determining themselves to either part of the contradiction?

Because they knew not how to account for a fore-knowledge that must be certain of Events that are so contingent.

Some being unwilling to part with the liberty of Man's Will, have given up the Præscience of God.

Others, as unwilling to part with the Doctrine of the Divine Præscience, have given up the liberty of Man's Will, and freedom of his Acting.

They both agree that such Contingents are not knowable.

The former therefore infer, that God does not fore-know them.

The latter teach that God does foreknow them, but has to that end remov'd them from a State of possibility, into a condition of futurity, from being such things as only may be, to be such things as certainly shall be; (i. e.) that he might foreknow them, has by his Decree pre-determined them, and so made them not to be Contingents.

But have we not as many Demonstrations of the Error of the former, as we have Prophecies in Scripture of future Contingents? For if God has foretold, that such Events, as depend upon the freest determinations of Man's Will, shall fall out so, or so, he must certainly foreknow them; for if he did not foreknow, how could he foretel them?

And have we not as many Arguments to prove the mistake of the Latter, as we have Laws and Precepts laid down in Scripture for the directing, and governing of moral Actions, and Rewards and Punishments assign'd there for Obedience or Disobedience to those Laws? For, if Men were not free Agents, or had no power of determining their own Actions, they could not be either capable of doing moral Good or Evil, or consequently Subjects of Rewards, or Punishments, for one or the other.

Leaving therefore these attempts of *vain Philosophy*, vain then certainly, if ever so, when it puts Man upon being *Wise above what is written* in Things pertaining to God, upon knowing more of him, than he has been pleas'd to discover of himself, let us give heed to the more sure word of Prophecy, the Revelations of Scripture, the only light that shines, or can guide us in these dark Enquiries.

And first for his Omnipresence; let us see what God himself says of it by his Prophets, *Is. 66. v. 1. Thus saith the Lord, the Heaven is my Throne, and the Earth is my Footstool*; and *Jer. 23. v. 24. Do not I fill Heaven and Earth, saith the Lord?* Heaven and Earth are frequently used in Scripture to signify the whole Universe, and all the parts of it; so Moses, speaking of the whole Creation, *Gen. 1. 1. says, In the beginning God created Heaven and the Earth*; that is, the whole World, and all the Creatures in it; and in that Sense it is used by our Saviour, *Mat. 5. 18. till Heaven and Earth pass, i. e. till the whole Fabrick of the World be dissolved*: So then God declares of himself that he fills all Places, and therefore cannot be excluded from any.

Again, the Prophet David in the 139 Psalm cries out at the 7 Verse, *Whither O Lord shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy Presence? Whither? why I can go no where from thee, for if I ascend up into Heaven thou art there; if I make my Bed in Hell behold thou art there; if I take the Wings of the Morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the Sea, even there shall thy Hand lead me; or if I say the darkness shall cover me, even the Night shall be light about me. There is no Place so high or deep, or remote or obscure, but thou, O God, art present in it. To these Words of David, let me add those of his Son Solomon at the Dedication of the Temple, 1 Kings 8. 27. Will God indeed dwell on the Earth? Behold the Heaven, and Heaven of Heavens, cannot*

contain thee. From all which, we learn thus much concerning God's Omnipresence, that God fills all Places, and yet is not comprehended in any. If any one ask how these Things can be, that he should be excluded from no Place, and yet included in none? I must answer with the *Psalmist* in the verse immediately preceeding those I lately quoted, That *such Knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is too high I cannot attain to it*: The manner how, is inexplicable by the Wit of Men, but the Thing certain from the Word of God, that he who is infinite and cannot be circumscribed, is so present every where, that there is no Place, nor can any be conceived, where he is not.

2. For God's Omniscience; and here, without departing from the guidance of the Scripture, we may conclude, that his Knowledge, who is in every thing infinitely Perfect, is very different, as all his Ways are, from our imperfect ones: That he does not know Things after our weak manner, being led by Discourse and Ratiocination from Things known, to Things unknown; but all Things are at once present to him, he sees and knows them all at one simple View, as the Apostle speaks, *Heb. 4. 13. All Things are naked and open to the Eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

All Events and Occurrences *whosoever* they happen, for *Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?* Jer. 23. 23.

All, *whosoever* they happen, not only present, and past, but future ones too; upon this Head God challengeth the Gods of the Heathens, *Is. 41. 21, 22, 23. Prosecute your Cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong Reasons, — Let them bring forth and shew us what shall happen, — shew the Things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods*; and this Knowledge of future Things St. James ascribes to God, *Acts 15. 18. Known to God are all his Works from the beginning of of the World.*

All, not only those of greater Consequence, as the changing of States, and revolutions of Governments, *He ruleth in the Kingdom of Men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will,* Dan. 4. 17. in which Prophecy he foretold the great Monarchy's long before they were set up; but his Knowledge extends to the the most inconsiderable Events, and minutest Things, *Not a Sparrow falls to the Ground without him, and the very Hairs of our Head are all numbered.*

And not only natural Events, but whatsoever proceeds from rational and free Agents, he perfectly knows; *Can any Man hide himself in secret Places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord,* Jer. 23. 21. and as to the Actions of Men David tell us *Psalm 33. 13, 15. The Lord looks from Heaven, he beholds all the Sons of Men, — he considereth all their Works*: Nay, as to their Words and their very Thoughts, he says, *Psalm 139. there is not a word in my Tongue but thou O Lord knowest it altogether, v. 4. And v. 2. Thou, Lord, understandest my thoughts afar off*; in short, all Things near, or far off, past, present or future, even Contingent Things, little or great, whether the works of God, the effects of Nature, the necessary actions of Brutes, the free ones of Men, their Words and Thoughts,

Thoughts, and whatsoever is knowable, they are all clearly open at one view to the Divine Omniscience. This may startle our poor Reason, but even that Will tell us, that as to the Divine Perfections, it becomes us to admire what we cannot comprehend, and instead of searching curiously into this great Attribute, to cry out with St. Paul, Rom. 11. 33. 34. *O the depth of the Riches of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out! for who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his Counsellor?*

Now a hearty assent to, or firm belief of these two Attributes of God, that he is so every where present, that we cannot be any where, where he is not; that he so knows all things, that we can neither suffer, do, speak, nor think any thing that he knows not, is the first Thing imply'd in *setting God before us*.

2. The Second is a practical Consideration of these Attributes, or an application of that belief to the Government of our Lives: For this Faith, without it produces a suitable practice, will be so far from Advantaging us, that it will aggravate our Sins, and make our Condemnation heavier than it would have been, if we had been ignorant of, or Infidels in those Attributes. *To set God before us*, then is not only to believe, that where ever we are, we are in his Presence, but so to behave our selves every where, as becomes that awful Presence; not only to believe that whatever we do, is seen by him, but for that Reason, to endeavour, that whatever we do, may be approved by him; and how this may be done, we shall have occasion to shew more particularly, in the remaining Inquiries. The next whereof is,

II. Under what Notion of him we are, *to set God before us*.

And here I shall consider God, with relation,

1. To moral Actions, and
2. To other Events.

I. In relation to moral Actions, we are to consider God,

1. As an holy Law-giver, that has prescrib'd righteous and good Laws for the Government of them.

God is frequently represented in Scripture under the Notion of a Law giver; *the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Law-giver*, says the Prophet, Is. 33. 22. *and there is one Law-giver that is able to save and destroy*, says St. James 4. 10. now God has prescrib'd Laws for the Government of our Lives two ways,

1. By imprinting in the Heart of Man, the common notices of Good and Evil in the first Creation of him which shew him what is Honest, and what Dishonest, what is to be done, and what to be avoided, this is called the *Law of Nature*; and this St. Paul speaks of in the 2d Chap. of the Epistle to the Romans, at the 14 Verse, *When the Gentiles which have not the Law, i.e. not the reveal'd Law, do yet by Nature the Thing contain'd in the Law, these having not the Law, are a Law to themselves, which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts*; and this Law is sufficient both to convince the Transgressors of Sin, as it there follows,

their Conscience also bearing Witness, and their Thoughts their λογισμοί, their Reasonings within them either accusing or excusing one another, and also that they deserve Death for it ; for speaking of the same Gentiles who had no other Law, he says at the 32d Verse of the 1st Chap. Who knowing the Judgement of God, that they which commit such things, i. e. Things forbidden by this Law of Nature and right Reason, are worthy of Death.

2. By raising up fit Persons, inspiring them with the Knowledge of his Will, sending them to discover it to Mankind, and empowering them to justify their Mission that they were sent by him ; and what he has communicated to Men by the instrumentality of such Prophets, is called, in an especial manner, his *reveal'd Law* : And this we have in the Books of the Old and New Testament, chiefly in the latter, wherein we have the last and most perfect Revelation of his Mind and Law, which he has made by our great Prophet, his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ ; who has perfected the Moral Law, and brought Life and Immortality to Light ; who has explain'd it more clearly, extended its Authority and directive Power more widely, and enforc'd its Obligation more strongly, than the former Revelations had done ; by clearing it from the false Glosses, with which the Scribes and Lowyers had obscured and defaced it, by subjecting the very Thoughts of the Heart to its Rule, and by setting its Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments in their due light, both as to quality and duration : This is a perfect Law indeed, reaching to every thing in us that is capable of moral Good, or Evil ; our Deeds, our Words, our very Thoughts, requiring in all the greatest Sincerity, and Purity, and proposing the most glorious Rewards to Invite, and the most dreadful Punishments to affright us into Obedience.

2. In setting God before us, we must consider him as an exact and curious observer of our Behaviour, with respect to his Laws ; this is what is meant by those Expressions in Scripture, where he is said to weigh, to ponder the Ways and Spirits and Heart of Man, Prov. 16. 2. *All the ways of a Man are clean in his own Eyes, but the Lord weigheth the Spirits,* and Chap. 24. 12. *Does not he that pondereth the Heart consider it, and he that keepeth the Soul, doth not he know it ?* Other Metaphors are used in Scripture, taken from the practice of Men, in entring things of Consequence, that they would not forget, in Books ; so the Spirit is pleased to condescend to our Weakness, to shew that God does not only observe but remember all the Actions of every Man, with their particular Circumstances. As to the virtuous Actions of good Men, the Prophet Malachi tell us, cap. 3. verse 16. *they that fear'd the Lord spake often one to another, i. e. frequently entertain'd one another with Holy and Heavenly Conversation, and the Lord hearken'd and heard it, and a Book of Remembrance was written before him, for them that fear'd the Lord, and that thought upon his Name,* and the same Metaphor is used in relation to the Sins of Men, where David begs of God, Psal. 51. *to blot out his Transgressions,* and when God promises his People Israel, Is. 43. 25. *that he will blot out their Transgressions, and not remember their Sins.* And in the

Vision or Prophetic description of the last Judgment in the 20th of the Rev. where St. John says, *he saw the Dead small and great stand before the Throne of God, he tells us, that the Books were open'd, and that the Dead were judg'd out those Things which were written in the Books, according to their Works.*

3. Lastly, in setting God before us, we must consider him as a bountiful Rewarder of those that are Obedient to him, and as a severe, but just Punisher of such as are Disobedient; for that he might be so, is the great Reason, that he does so nicely watch, and take so strict notice of the Actions, and even the Thoughts of all Men. This he tells us by the Prophet Jer. 17. 10. *I the Lord search the Heart, I try the Reins, to what end? Why, even to give to every Man according to his ways, and according to the Fruit of his doings:* And this the Apostle assures us in 2 Rom. 5. &c. *he will do at the Day of the Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God, when he will render to every Man according to his Deeds; to them, who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for Glory and Honour, and Immortality, Eternal Life; but unto them that are Contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath; Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil; but Glory, Honour and Peace to every Man that worketh good.* And now you see under what notion of him we are to set God before us, in relation to moral Actions.

1. As an holy Law-giver.

2. As a curious observer of our Behaviour with respect to his Laws. And,

3. As a bountiful rewarder of the Obedient, and a severe, but just punisher, of the Disobedient.

2. In relation to other Events, in setting him before us, we must consider him, as the wise orderer and disposer of them, and that none of them are the Effects of blind Chance, or fatal Necessity, but all the results of his wise Counsel; that every thing that befalls us, or any of his Creatures, is by his appointment or permission, who directs, governs, and disposes all Occurrences to the greatest and best Ends, his own Glory, and the good of those that love and serve him.

The only remaining Particular to be explain'd, is,

3. How we must set God always before us? By which is not meant, that we must think upon these Attributes of God's Omnipresence and Omniscience every moment of our Lives, and actually apply our Belief of them to every the minutest, and most indifferent Action of them: But it is,

1. To live under such and habitual Sense of those his glorious Perfections, as may influence the general Conduct of our Lives, and govern all our Actions of greater Consequence, those that are matter of Sin or Duty: But because habits are neither got, nor preserv'd without repeat'd acts; in order to obtain, and keep up in us such an habitual Sense of God's Omnipresence, and Omniscience, it will be necessary to fix some certain and

stated

stated times (besides the occasional ones which I shall mention by and by) for an actual Consideration of them.

And surely, once in the return of every Day, cannot be thought too often, even by those, whose strait Circumstances, and mean Employments, make their daily Labour little enough for the necessary Support of themselves and their Families; they, methinks, cannot grudge half an Hour in the four and twenty to be spent in this great Business; but how can they excuse themselves from it, whom their bountiful God has placed in a Condition, beyond the necessity, not only of labouring, but even of *taking thought for what they shall Eat, or what they shall Drink, or wherewithal they shall be Cloath'd?* (who' God knows, too many hardly employ their Thoughts to any better Purposes) can they pretend they cannot afford such a pittance of their time for this Employment? and yet were this small Proportion but wisely and honestly laid out in it by all of us, I will venture to say, we should see another Face of Things than we now do.

That part of the Day, which I should think would be most properly, and usefully assign'd for this purpose, is the Morning, when we first wake, not only for the fitness and congruity of the Thing, as certainly it is very fit and congruous, that when God has preserv'd us whilst we slept, he should be the first Object of our waking Thoughts: That when he, as *David* expresses it, *has been about our Bed* all Night, we should entertain a Conversation with him, before any others are admitted, who come in the Morning upon Business or Compliment: But especially, for the good influence it may have upon our whole demeanure the Day after; if by serious Contemplation in the Morning, we make a deep impression upon our Minds of God's Omnipresence and Omniscience, it will hardly be wore out before Night; and if we do this every Morning, 'tis the likeliest way to beget and maintain in us an habitual Sense of them: But besides living under an habitual Sense of these Attributes of God.

2. To set God before us *always*, is actually to apply our Belief of them in special Cases: And those I take to be chiefly these three:

1. In time of Temptation, whether from the Pleasure and Advantage the Sin will give, or from the Difficulties and Dangers a Duty may expose us to:

2. In time of Divine Worship; And,

3. In all remarkable Events that happen to us, whether Adverse or Prosperous.

1. In case of temptation to Sin, it is to consider that God who by his Laws has forbid the Thing I am tempted to, under the severest Penalty, is now present with me, and sees, whether I comply with the Temptation or not, that he will eternally reward me if I do not, and everlastingly punish me if I do.

2. In time of Divine Worship, whether private in the Closet, and there it is to consider, that though *the Door be shut*, yet God is not excluded, and however I am retired, *my Father which is in Heaven sees in Secret*, that

that even my mental Prayers enters into his Ears, and the motions of my Heart are open to his Eyes ; or publick in the Church, and there it is to consider that God is in a more especial manner present in the Assembly of the Faithful, that he knows out of what Principle, and for what Purposes every one comes thither, whether out of obedience to his Commands, and in hopes of his Blessing, or whither out of Curiosity, Custom, Formality, yain Glory, or for worse Purposes ; that he beholds our Behaviours, and sees whether our Heart go along with our Prayers, or whither we offer him only a Lip-Service, whether we attend to his Word, and receive it in the Love of it in order to practice it, or whether we sleep or talk away the Time, in which his Ambassadors are delivering their Errand to us ; or at best *are forgetful Hearers of it deceiving our own Souls* ; whether we approach his holy Altar out of love to our Saviour, and in grateful remembrance of his Sufferings for us, which are there exhibited to us, out of a Sense of our own Sins and Wants, in hopes to receive Pardon for one, and a supply for the other at the Hands of our merciful God ; or else out of base Designs, and worldly Considerations, thereby prostituting the Ordinances of God to the service of *Mammon*.

3. In all remarkable Events that happen to us, whether Adverse or Prosperous ; in time of Adversity it is to consider, that *Afflictions arise not out of the Dust*, but come upon me by the appointment or permission of that God who sees my present Condition, knows my Strenght, and perfectly understands what is best for me, who is present with me, and can deliver me out of it, or support me under it, and direct the Issue to my greatest Advantage ; in time of Prosperity, when I have received any Eminent, whether Deliverance or positive Blessings, it is to look above 2d Causes, up to God as the Author thereof, it is to reflect, that he that has bestow'd the Mercies upon me, sees how I use them, whether I employ them to his Glory who gave them, or in the service of his Enemies.

And thus, by living under such an habitual Sense of God's Omnipresence and Omniscience, as may influence the general Conduct of our Lives, especially our Actions of greater Consequence, such as are Matters of Sin and Duty ; and by particular application of our Faith in those attributes, to the especial cases of Temptation, of Divine Worship, and in any remarkable Events, whether Adverse or Prosperous that happen to us, we may discharge the great Duty, which *David* practised in the Text, *of setting God always before us*.

2. It now only remains that I recommend the Pattern he has set, to your Imitation ; and methinks I cannot have much to do upon this Head. You cannot but infer from what has been already said, the blessed influence that this practice would have upon you, not only in the foremention'd Cases, but in all Conditions and Circumstances of Life.

What Temptation of Pleasure or Advantage can prevail with a Man to commit a Sin, who knows and considers, that he cannot do it, but in the presence and sight of his Judge, who has strictly forbidden it, and will Eternally Damn him for it ; this baffles that poor Encouragement to
comply

comply with a Temptation, that privacy offers : in vain does the Adulterer watch for the Twilight to execute his filthy Purposes ; in vain does the Riotous choose the Night for his Debauches ; in vain does any Sinner seek out the remotest and darkest Corner for to act his Villanies in : By such Methods indeed he may hide his Sins from the sight and knowledge of Men, but alas what will that avail him, when whatever he does, *in Darkness and in the Closet*, is as open to God, as if it had been done at Noon-Day, or on the House-top ?

What a Fool does this shew him to be, who being restrain'd by Shame, or Fear, or some worldly Consideration from the outward Acts, will yet venture to gratify his wicked Fancy, by indulging Lustful, Covetous, Revengeful or any wicked Thoughts ; when God as clearly sees his Heart, as he does the Actions that proceed from it ?

What Difficulties or Dangers can hinder or affright that Man from his Duty, that lives under the sense and influence of this Faith ? Oppositions we must expect to meet wit in our Christian Life, we are not only to strive, and to run, but *to Wrestle and Fight too, not only against Flesh and Blood, but against Principalities and against Powers, against the Rulers of the Darkness of this World, against spiritual Wickedness in high Places, against the corruptions of our own Nature, the Malice of wicked Men, and the Power of evil Spirits ;* but let these Enemies be as Numerous, and Powerful, and Malicious as they can ; yet he cannot want Encouragement to engage them, that *sets God always before him*. For what can more animate a brave Soldier, than to fight in the fight of his Prince or General, who will be sure to take notice of those that distinguish themselves, and Reward them with particular Marks of his Favour ? How then must the *Soldier of Christ*, be encouraged in all his Conflicts, with his Spiritual Enemies ? how must he be excited, *to fight the good fight*, by this Consideration, that *the Captain of his Salvation* stands by him, not only to see how he behaves himself, but to strengthen and support, to help him to overcome, and then to bestow upon him *the Crown of Life* ?

How Constant, Reverent and Devout would this Faith make a Man in the worship of God ? he would not dare to neglect the Duties of the Closet, at least the offering up of a Morning and Evening Sacrifice to him, no more than he would to employ that time, which is set a part for the Publick Service, to secular and sinful uses ? Would he, that considers that God sees him wherever he is, dare Sacrilegiously to rob him of that Day which is consecrated to his more immediate Service, and of the attendance he should pay him on it in his own House, by making it, (no necessity so requiring) a Day for Journeys and Business, a Day of Recreations and vain Diversions ; or if he come to the Place of publick Worship, would he dare to rush into that more immediate Presence of the great God, with as little consideration, *as the Horse rusheth into the Battle* ? To be have himself there, with less reverence and decency, than he would in the sight of his Prince, or of any great and venerable Man ; or if some temporal Respects make his outward demeanure more grave and compos'd, would he dare

dare to let his Heart be wandring after his *Mammon*, or his Pleasures, his Mind be taken up with his worldly designs, or lewd Intrigues? No, he that knows himself to be every where under the All-seeing Eye of God, will be as punctual to the returns of the Hours for the Devotions of the Closet, where only his *Father sees in Secret*, as of the times for the publick Worship of him *in the great Congregation*: He will keep his Feet, as the Wise-Man expresses it, *when he goes to the House of God*; he will prepare his Heart before he comes thither, and watch both That and his Body too, when he is there, order the inward motions of one, and the outward gestures of the other, so that he may present both, his whole Man, *an holy Sacrifice acceptable unto God*.

In time of Adversity, what a comfort is it to reflect, that all a Man's Wants and Troubles are seen and known by him, who is able to supply and relieve him, and willing too, if he sees it best for him? That how bitter soever the Cup he has to drink of may seem to him, yet the Draught is of his Heavenly Father's mixing, who *never afflicts his Children willingly*, but always for their good, who perfectly understands both his weakness, and the strength of the Portion, and will so far abate of this, or supply the other by the aid of his Grace, that it shall *Work for his good*; and the affliction, tho' for the present it may not seem joyous but grievous, shall afterwards yield him the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness.

In time of Prosperity, what a powerful Antidote is this Faith and Consideration against all the dangers of that State? Is a Man's Lot fallen in a fair ground, has he a goodly Heritage, does his Cup overflow, is he laden with Honours, rais'd to posts of Power? Why he who believes and considers that God who bestows upon him these Blessings, or rather entrusts him with these Talents, is every where with him, and sees how he employs them, will he dare to abuse them to other Purposes than those God design'd them for? No surely, where the rich Man thoroughly convinc'd, and would he think upon it, that God, who gave him his Riches to this end, *That he might be rich in good Works*, always sees him, and observes what use he makes of them, and will reckon with him for them; he would not
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either miserably hoard them up, and let them lie useless by him, or extravagantly squander them away in Vanity, Excess, and Riot; but having made a competent Provision for his Family, he would make his own Life comfortable, by a moderate and thankful Enjoyment of a Portion of them, and give himself the much truer Pleasure, and more solid Satisfaction, in relieving the Necessitous, and making glad the Heart of the Poor, and doing all the good he can, by a cheerful and prudent Distribution of the rest; did the Man distinguish'd by great Titles and Characters, whom his Lord has *bid to sit up higher* plac'd him in a rank above the common level of Mankind, did he believe and consider himself always in the presence of that glorious Being, who is exalted infinitely more above him, than he is above the meanest of his Brethren, and *who has also made him to differ from the rest*, would he suffer his Advancements to minister to his Pride, and Vain Glory? would the poor Bubble swell with Air till it is ready to crack? would he look down with Scorn and Contempt upon his Inferiors? No, he wou'd cry out with *Job, Mine Eye seeth thee; O Lord, wherefore I abhor my self in Dust and Ashes*; he would answer the Designs of Providence in advancing him so high, by rendring the beauty of Virtue and Piety more conspicuous by his practicing of them, and by recommending the Practice of them more forcibly to those under him, by the influence of his Example and Authority. Did the Man of Power consider himself always in the Sight and Hands of that Almighty Being, who gave him his Power, and expects he should employ it to the same just and good Purposes, that he does his own, he would not abuse it to countenance Violence and Injustice, and to trample down Innocence and Right, but he would make use of it, *To deliver the oppressed from him that spoileth him, to bring down the high Looks of the Proud, and to punish the wrong Doer*. And by thus guarding him against the sinful Abuses of his Prosperity, this Faith and Consideration effectually secure a Man from those Stings, and Horrors, with which his guilty Reflections upon such Abuses would have disturb'd his Enjoyment of it, and by engaging him to employ it to the excellent Purposes, for which it was given him, afford him the just

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relish of it at present, and a reasonable hope of God's continuing it to him for the future.

In short, this Practice would direct a Man wisely in the whole Conduct of his moral Life, and carry him with ease and cheerfulness through all the passages of the natural One: This lays the only solid Foundation, for that which alone can recommend our Behaviour to God in the one, and for our true Quiet and Comfort in the other.

That which alone can render our Labours and Services pleasing to God, and which he accepts of instead of Perfection, is Integrity and Sincerity: But what can make us Honest and Sincere, and without Hypocrisie in our whole Behaviour, towards God, our Neighbour, and our Selves, in all our Deeds, Words and Thoughts, if the belief and consideration that they cannot be hid from, but are all naked and open to God, cannot?

That which of all things, next to the guilt of Sin, makes Men's Lives uneasy and troublesome, is their too eager Concern and Solitude, for the obtaining or securing the Things in this World: But surely this Practice, if any thing would cure that restless Solitude, and make us to be as the Apostle advises, *without Carefulness*: By which I don't mean that it would, or should make a Man neglect the Duties of his particular Calling, or those honest Methods, which God allows him to use for the obtaining, not only the necessaries, but the conveniences and comforts of Life; but it will teach him, after having used his own lawful Endeavours for those Purposes, not to disquiet himself about the Success of them, but to refer that entirely to God, who alone directs or permits all Events; and whatever Issue he shall be pleas'd to give, humbly to acquiesce in, and approve of it, as knowing that he perfectly understands his Circumstances, is better able to choose for him, than he is to choose for himself.

What abundance of Solitude and Fears does he discharge himself of, that can cast himself and all his care upon the Almighty God, who he knows is always with him and cares for him? his Days are not distracted by anxious Thoughts, nor his Nights disturb'd with uneasy Fears; *he walks before God* in security all Day, and lays himself down in great Peace at Night, being assured that God who is about his Bed, *makes him dwell in Safety while he is taking his Rest.*

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In all Times and Places, and upon all Occasions, he has free access to God, lays open his Infirmities, his Wants, his Pressures to him, and by a faithful application of the promises of Scripture to himself (in which he does as assuredly believe God speaks to him, as if one from the Dead, or an Angel from Heaven had brought the Message) he comforts and supports himself under, or rather exults and triumphs over them; is he perplex'd with difficulties, out of which he knows not how to extricate himself, at a loss which way to turn, or what to do? He applies to himself that Promise of *David*, *Commit thy way to the Lord and he shall bring it to pass*: Is he under a Temptation, that seems too weighty for him? he applies to himself the Words of God to *St. Paul*, *my Grace is sufficient for thee, my Strength is perfected in Weakness*. Is he surrounded with dangers that threaten every Thing that he values and loves, even his Life, & he applies to himself what God says to his People *Israel*, by the Prophet *Isaiah*, *Fear not thou Worm Jacob, for I am with thee, be not dismay'd I will strengthen, I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right Hand of my Righteousness; when thou passest thro' the Water I will be with thee, and when thou walkest through the Fire, thou shalt not be burnt*.

To conclude, He that sets God always before him does by an Eye of Faith, see him that is invisible with great Comfort and Joy in every Stage and Condition of Life; but never with more, than in the last Scene of it, when he lies upon his Death-Bed: When he is *To walk thro' the Valley of the Shadow of Death*, even then he fears no Evil, for he sees his God with him, to make all his Beds in his Sickness; with him to support him under the Pains of his Distemper and decays of his Body, with the bright manifestations of his Presence, and ravishing discoveries of his Love; with him to guard him against all the attempt, of the Powers of darkness; with him to strengthen him in his last Conflict, to receive his Spirit into his Hands, to make his Flesh rest in hope, and finally to raise his Body from the Grave, and re-unite it to his Soul, to dwell together in his Presence where is the fulness of Joy, and at whose right Hand are Pleasures for evermore.

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